

The VOICEs of Democracy: A Festival for Ten-Minute Monologues

Professor Eraldo Souza dos Santos, UC Irvine

Project Summary

In Samuel Beckett's groundbreaking play, *Waiting for Godot* (1953), Lucky, enslaved by Pozzo, remains silent throughout. But with one exception: when his master allows it, Lucky delivers a long, incoherent monologue that sheds light on his experience with unfreedom.

Lucky is no exception in the history of playwriting and theater: Monologues have been used throughout history to give voice to the unheard and remain among the most common forms for expressing challenges to free expression.

In the United States, there has been a long tradition of organizing festivals for ten-minute plays that gather actors, directors, and playwrights from across the country each year. This project is organizing the first festival of this kind in the University of California system. Three monologues will be selected for staging at UC Irvine in June 2026. Each author will receive a \$500 stipend to participate in the in-person event. A free, open-to-all online workshop with a specialist in monologues, Samuel Heyman, kicked off the activities in January 2026. A call for monologues was circulated among members of the UC community and playwrights between March and April. We are now selecting the three winners who will be participating in the in-person event in September or October 2026.

Impact

What impact did your work have on the campus community?

Despite our outreach efforts, most participants in the events so far have been members of the School of Social Ecology, where I teach. But the impact has been tangible. In a school that centers "applied knowledge," students who are more artistically inclined feel out of place. Thanks to the

festival, many now think they can be both social scientists and artists, if they wish. For the final event in the fall, we will be able to circulate a university-wide email about the festival, which will hopefully bring more attention to it.

Were your project objectives met?

So far, they have been met. We expected more participants to join the initial workshop. Despite our initial efforts, only 17 people attended. This may have been due to the timing, as it took place in January, at the beginning of the Winter quarter at UC Irvine.

What demographics did attendees/ participants represent (students, staff, faculty, community members, etc.)?

In quantitative terms, community members were more represented in both workshop attendance and festival submissions. Students, staff, and faculty are, above all, represented on the jury currently selecting the three winners of the festival. The workshop on writing short plays and monologues included 17 participants, from the United States and the Netherlands. We received 94 submissions for the festival in total, including entries from Egypt, Italy, Northern Ireland, Zimbabwe, and the United States. We aim for approximately 50 people to attend the festival's final event in the fall (the room's capacity).

So far, the jury has 9 members, including 1 nonfiction writer and 1 professor from Brazil, 1 graduate student from the United Kingdom, 3 UC Irvine undergraduate students, 1 professor of political science from UC Riverside, the Vice Chancellor and Chief Digital Officer of UC Merced, and an Assessment Coordinator for the UC Santa Barbara Office of Teaching and Learning and Office of Budget and Planning. We are still recruiting volunteers. We plan to organize the festival again next academic year, with a different topic, to be determined.